

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, TO BE HOSTED BY LET'S ERASE THE STIGMA EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

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Los Angeles, CA – (May 4, 2011) – The children's charity Let's Erase the Stigma Educational Foundation (LETS) will host its First Annual Youth Summit at the California Endowment on May 23, 2011 from 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM. This year's Summit will focus on mental health and social inclusion, where 250 high school students from Los Angeles County schools and Transition Age Youth programs will receive scholarships to spend the day talking openly about mental illness and stigma. Together, youth attending this cultural event will create clear ideas of how they can create lasting change in the perception of mental illness through prevention, early education, and peer-to-peer dialogue. LETS has partnered with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health for this event.

The LETS First Annual Youth Summit, themed "Generation LETS," will invite young people to take meaningful roles in mental health leadership. Diverse youth from LETS Clubs in Los Angeles schools have formed a Youth Planning Committee to choose interactive workshops, special guest speakers, entertainment, educational materials, and activities relevant and exciting to today's high school students. This inaugural event has received the support of Dr. Stephen Hinshaw, Chair and Professor of the Department of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley. A world-renowned author and researcher on childhood behavior disorders, Dr. Hinshaw will present his work on the stigma of mental illness at the Summit. In the afternoon Dr. Marvin J. Southard, DSW, Director, Department of Mental Health, Los Angeles County, will present the First Annual Let's Erase the Stigma Social Inclusion Awards. Attending schools will receive the opportunity to begin their own LETS Clubs where students can continue to address the issues raised by the Summit.

The schools at the Summit will represent diverse student bodies, including underprivileged and minority populations. LETS will grant scholarships for Los Angeles students to attend the Summit, with no cost to these participants, who will also earn ten hours of community service. Partners can support the Summit by sponsoring a table, providing educational materials, or applying for scholarships of attendance at the LETS webpage.

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“Trends start in childhood, including what’s cool and what’s not. Let’s harness that power!” says Philippe Fontilea, LETS Founder and Chair. “Kids need a venue to talk about mental illness and how they prefer dialogue to the painful world of guilt, shame, and stigma. Let *them* come up with the solutions to slurs and bullying.”

LETS youth share mental health education through creative, student-led initiatives. Since the age of onset for many psychiatric disorders is during adolescence, early education can play a critical role in helping students understand that these illnesses and their symptoms are treatable. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for teens, and most teen hospitalizations are the result of a suicide attempt; but only three out of ten individuals with mental illness seek help. The LETS First Annual Youth Summit will prioritize prevention by fostering youth interest in mental health where previously there has been little involvement.

About Let’s Erase the Stigma Educational Foundation

LETS is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) children’s charity dedicated to erasing the stigma of mental illness by funding and developing educational programs, mentoring opportunities, and research possibilities designed to empower youth to change the perception of mental illness. LETS Educational Foundation establishes LETS Clubs in schools and community centers where members discuss stigma, learn about mental health, plan and lead their own stigma-erasing projects, and provide peer-to-peer education in their communities.

For more information, contact LETS at (888) 594-5387 or visit www.lets.org.

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